

Prevention Pathways

Online Courses

FACT SHEET

Recognizing Violence Against Women

Violence against women involves the threat or use of force that results in injury or death. Violence affects women of all races, ages, ethnic groups, sexual orientation, and income groups. Violent acts against women include:

- Domestic violence, spousal abuse, intimate partner violence
- Rape, sexual assault
- Family violence, battering
- Marital rape, matricide (killing one's mother)
- Dating violence, date rape (**dating violence** or **date rape** is violence that occurs between unmarried couples)
- Elder abuse
- Homicide¹

Types of Abuse

Men can be victims of domestic violence, but more than 85 percent of the victims of domestic violence are women.² Women are significantly more likely to be injured during an assault. A one-time incident is an assault. Men who repeatedly engage in physical or sexual violence, or emotional abuse are considered abusive.

Abuse may include:³

- **Emotional or Psychological Abuse**
 - Name calling
 - Saying mean things in public
 - Using cruel or threatening words
 - Being critical of statements and actions
 - Threatening to hurt the partner, a pet, a family member, or friend
 - Creating a state of constant fear
- **Sexual Abuse**
 - Any sexual act or behavior repeated over time without consent. A single incident is sexual assault. Multiple incidents are abuse.

Sexual assault may involve physical force or the threat of force, the use of guns or other weapons, and other tactics that are intended to harm and scare a partner. It includes forced touching of the genitals, anus, groin, or breast against a woman's will.

Sexual assault may be committed by a man who is a stranger, friend, family member, or intimate partner.⁴

- Younger women, aged 18-25 years, experience the greatest number of sexual assaults or rapes.

- **Physical Abuse**

- Pushing, shoving, kicking, grabbing
- Hitting, pulling hair, spitting, punching
- Choking, beating

- **Stalking**

- Harassing or threatening behavior that a person engages in more than one time. (Notify the police immediately if you suspect that a stalker is following you or someone you know.)
- Repeated receipt of unwanted notes, cards, or phone calls.

Stalking is behavior that makes the victim afraid for her safety. Stalkers usually are someone the victim knows well, such as a boyfriend or spouse.

- Roughly 8 percent of all women in the U.S. have been stalked in their lifetime. More than 1 million women are stalked each year.⁵
- Women between the ages of 18-29 years are at the highest risk of being stalked.

Men engage in acts of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse as a way to show and keep control. Most of the men who become violent in a relationship believe that it is a woman's duty to serve and obey them. They also may consider a woman's ideas and feelings less important than their own.

Legal Protection

Laws relating to violence against women differ from State to State. However, all States have some laws that are designed to protect victims of domestic violence, rape, or other sexual assaults. Under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), committing violence against a woman is also a Federal crime. See Module 11 for more information.

Definitions of domestic violence also vary. In general, domestic violence or intimate partner violence refers to actual or threatened physical, sexual, or psychological (emotional) abuse by a:

- Spouse or ex-spouse

- Boyfriend, girlfriend, ex-boyfriend, ex-girlfriend, or partner
- Date

At any age, being a victim of violence is devastating. If you or someone you know needs help, please see the **Resources** section of Module 3 for a listing of domestic violence and sexual assault coalitions and other useful materials.

For more information, go to www.samhsa.gov/preventionpathways and click on “courses” to find Module 3 of the online course, “It Won’t Happen to Me: *Substance Abuse and Violence Against Women*.”

References

¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2001). Intimate partner violence [Fact Sheet]. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2001. Available at www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/ipvfacts.htm

² Rennison, C. (2003, February). Intimate partner violence, 1993-2001 (Crime Data Brief, NCJ 197838). Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin. United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

³ Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women. (1992). Safety first: Battered women surviving violence when alcohol and drugs are involved. Minneapolis, MN: Author.

⁴ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Sexual violence. (2001). In C. Craft (Ed.), *Injury fact book 2001-2002*. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at www.cdc.gov/ncipc/fact_book/Index.htm

⁵ Tjaden, P., and Thoennes, N. “Stalking in America: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey.” National Institute of Justice/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Research in Brief. Publication No. NCJ 169592. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, April 1998.

⁶ Ibid.

